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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: COMCENTCOM ADMIRAL FALLON AND IRAQI VP AL-HASHIMI
DISCUSS POLITICAL PROCESS, DETAINEES

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (S) Summary. Visiting COMCENTCOM Admiral William J. Fallon, accompanied by Ambassador Crocker, met with Vice President and Sunni bloc leader Tariq al-Hashimi May 12 to press for progress on political benchmarks. Al-Hashimi stated his genuine desire for progress on key reconciliation issues including constitutional review and provincial elections. The VP acknowledged that "the time is short" but blamed a lack of mutual interest and mistrust among bloc leaders, and ultimately the Prime Minister, for the current impasse in the political process. Discussions centered on security issues including the improving situation in Anbar Province, MNF-I and GOI arrests and detentions of terror suspects, and infiltration of Iraqi security forces by sectarian militias. End summary.

Al Hashimi Understands Time Is Short

[¶2.](#) (C) In response to Admiral Fallon's request for his assessment of the political situation, VP Al-Hashimi said, "I am sure we are not moving in the right direction, or as fast as you expect." The VP acknowledged the lack of action on political benchmarks; he described the political process as "stagnant," blaming mistrust and lack of mutual interest among Iraqi leaders for blocking progress. Al-Hashimi reported having several meetings with PM al-Maliki in the past two days, saying only that the PM had made "promises on what he would achieve and when." We have a genuine desire to move forward, continued al-Hashimi, but the PM is "in the driver's seat -- it is up to him to make the necessary compromises -- we are in a wait-and-see mode."

[¶3.](#) (C) Admiral Fallon briefed al-Hashimi on his regional trip and his message to Arab leaders that support for the elected GOI is their best option for stabilizing Iraq. Admiral Fallon briefly described several highlights from his meeting with the Sultan of Oman as particularly encouraging, saying the Sultan believes al-Maliki is sincere in wanting to do the right thing for all Iraqis. Al-Hashimi replied that U.S. pressure on al-Maliki to move forward on national reconciliation was as least as important, particularly on the constitutional review, which could allow Sunni parties to share more substantially in decision-making.

Success against AQI in Anbar

[¶4.](#) (S) Admiral Fallon told the VP he had visited Anbar Province recently and found the security situation much improved. The VP agreed that there were signs of improvement in Anbar, both in mentality and facts on the ground. Engaging the tribes in Anbar against AQI has worked, the VP

acknowledged, but complained that the U.S. has a "guarded approach" in dealing with al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and other extremist elements. "You do not understand our fears or allow us to contribute to your policy making on how best to fight al-Qaida and terrorism," he said, and asked that MNF-I reach out more to include Sunnis in the fight. Admiral Fallon assured al-Hashimi that MNF-I understands that the Sunnis must feel part of this effort, pointing out how quickly the situation had turned around in Anbar despite the many difficulties.

Al-Hashimi Wants MOre GOI Support

15. (S) The Sunni parties are contributing to the fight against AQI and extremists behind the scenes, al-Hashimi told Admiral Fallon, but said they lacked enough support from the GOI to take a more public stance. The VP said he had been trying to engage the GOI for many months and had submitted a proposal for fighting AQI in Baghdad, but the GOI remained hesitant to give full support to Sunni efforts to stop violence. "We have a rigid discipline," the VP told Admiral Fallon, we could employ a "watertight system to disarm violent Sunni elements, but we cannot do it without the GOI because they (extremist elements) are so heavily armed."

Detainees

16. (S) Admiral Fallon raised the sensitive issue of US-held detainees, telling the VP that Speaker Mashhadani had raised the matter with him several weeks ago and he responded that

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he was interested in looking into options to ameliorate the problem. COMCENTCOM said MNF-I might consider a number of low-risk options under tightly negotiated circumstances. Thinking aloud, Admiral Fallon mentioned that one option might be to explore how parole of some detainees to tribal leaders might work. Al-Hashimi balked at this option, stating that his personal image had been destroyed due to broken promises to his constituency regarding detainee releases. "Do not go directly to the tribes," the VP implored, "come to us so I can restore my image and we can prove that we can deliver." Al-Hashimi claimed that he could monitor parolees through weekly checks at police stations. The VP said he would pass along to MNF-I his own plan to secure and rehabilitate released detainees by providing jobs and encouraging 'normal life,' and suggested he work together with MNF-I on a joint strategy.

Militia Infiltration of Security Force

17. (C) Al-Hashimi expressed concern about Congressional moves to impose a timetable for U.S. troop withdrawals from Iraq. He said he agreed with President Bush that setting a timetable plays into AQI's hand. But, at the end of the day U.S. troops will leave, he said. "I am afraid of a security vacuum when your troops leave," and asked COMCENTCOM, "Who will replace your troops, who will stop our country from sliding into chaos?" The VP said he was afraid of the vacuum that would be created by a U.S. withdrawal because of the increasing infiltration of Iraqi security forces by militia. This can only be solved, he said, by a competent and patriotic Iraqi army. Fixing De-ba'athification is important in preventing the polarization of security forces, he continued, pointing to a tremendous reservoir of cross-sectarian professions available. The VP suggested calling up whole units or divisions of the ex-army, rather than individuals, thereby including both Sunni and Shia.

18. (C) CoR member and Deputy Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) Chief,

Ayad Samarraie, also in attendance, raised the issue of GOI Baghdad Security Plan (BSP)-related arrests. A large number of individuals are arrested by Iraqi forces under the BSP daily, said Samarraie, claiming that PM al-Maliki was unresponsive to Sunni bloc human rights-related requests, such as providing names of those arrested and charges against them. "Unknown bodies are found everyday in the streets, who are they?" asked Samarraie, suggesting that many may have been killed and dumped by Iraqi forces. "We agreed to the request to support the GOI in implementing the BSP," added al-Hashimi, "now they are not respecting their obligations."

Sunni Support for Early Provincial Elections

¶9. (C) Pointing out that the Anbar Provincial Council (PC) was back in Ramadi, the Ambassador suggested that the major Sunni parties take advantage of this new dynamic to strengthen their own moderates. The PC needs to develop a budget, present it, and proceed with budget execution, said the Ambassador, promising that the Embassy was ready to provide technical advisors. Moving to the broader issue of national provincial elections, Ambassador asked al-Hashimi whether the IIP would support staggered elections, with early elections in provinces where Sunnis are underrepresented. The VP replied that he was very much in favor of early provincial elections. As for earlier elections in select provinces, he said the problem of voter participation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees would first need to be addressed. Turning to Samarraie, the VP suggested following-up with CoR members to discuss the complex details of a potential plan for Iraqis seeking refuge outside their provinces to participate in provincial elections.

¶10. (U) Admiral William J. Fallon has reviewed this message.
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